

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR SELLING
ADVERTISING SPACE ON ELECTRONIC BILLBOARDS
OVER THE INTERNET

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CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present Application claims priority to both of the following U.S. provisional Patent Applications:

5 Serial No. 60/130,602, filed April 22, 1999, entitled "System and Method for Selling Advertising Space on Electronic Billboards over the Internet"; and

 Serial No. 60/147,673, filed August 6, 1999, entitled "System and Method for Selling Advertising Space on Electronic Billboards over the Internet."

10 TECHNICAL FIELD

 The present invention relates in general to computer networks, and in particular, to performing e-commerce transactions over the Internet.

15 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

 Electronic billboards are poised to transform the billboard industry by permitting multiple ads to be displayed on an electronic billboard at any desired time and frequency. Moreover, the transportation of the ads to a particular billboard can be
20 made using any type of electronic means, including wireless transmission.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention permits a user to access the billboard provider's website to order and upload a desired ad to a particular billboard anywhere within the world.

5 More specifically, an advertiser can upload advertising data to a server operating a particular billboard via a remote computer. Once approved for content, the advertising data can then be transmitted to the billboard for display at a time and duration selected by the advertiser.

10 The billboard to display the advertising information can be located indoors or outdoors.

Though the present invention is described with respect to the display of advertisements, any information, including video and still images can be uploaded and displayed on the indoor or outdoor billboards in accordance with the present invention.

15 The foregoing has outlined rather broadly the features and technical advantages of the present invention in order that the detailed description of the invention that follows may be better understood. Additional features and advantages of the invention will be described hereinafter which form the subject of the claims of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present invention, and the advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIGURE 1 illustrates an example of billboard locations within the continental United States;

FIGURE 2 illustrates an electronic billboard;

FIGURE 3 illustrates a flowchart configured in accordance with the present invention;

FIGURE 4 illustrates a process for enabling a viewer of a billboard to receive other information about products advertised on that particular billboard; and

FIGURE 5 illustrates an architecture for transmitting data to and from various billboards.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

5 In the following description, numerous specific details are set forth to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will be obvious to those skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without such specific details. In other instances, well-known circuits have been shown in block diagram form in order not to obscure the present invention in unnecessary detail. For the most part, details concerning timing considerations and the like have been omitted in as much as such details are not necessary to obtain a complete understanding of the present invention and are within the skills of persons of ordinary skill in the relevant art.

10 Refer now to the drawings wherein depicted elements are not necessarily shown to scale and wherein like or similar elements are designated by the same reference numeral through the several views.

15 Outdoor billboards are located throughout the United States and even worldwide. Traditionally, billboards have been of the paper/poster type, where the ad on the billboard must be manually changed on a periodic basis using one or more workers. As a result, for a definitive period of time, usually one month or longer, only a single ad can be displayed on any particular billboard.

20 Indoor billboards are also gaining a foothold by displaying on the inside walls, or other locations, information about products and special sales within the

store. Again, the problem with such traditional posters and indoor billboards is that they must be manually changed, thus limiting their versatility and effectiveness.

Electronic billboards, such as the ones illustrated in FIGURES 2A and 2B, have the capability of displaying still or video images in a manner similar to a television or a computer display. FIGURE 2A illustrates an outdoor billboard 201 having an electronic display 200 configured in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. FIGURE 2B illustrates an indoor electronic billboard 203 for displaying advertising information, or any other information, on a wall 202 of the inside of the store. A processor and memory device, along with driver electronics and software are located at the electronic billboard site. The images to be displayed can be stored within the memory, and then are displayed in a desired manner using software. For example, a multitude of different ads can be displayed at different and preselected frequencies and durations of time. The ads can be uploaded to the billboard system through a direct connection locally, or remotely using landlines, cable, satellite signaling, fiber optic cable, wireless transmissions, etc. As a result, a central location can upload various ads to various billboards located across the United States (FIGURE 1 illustrates an example of electronic billboards, noted by X's, throughout the United States), or even worldwide. Alternatively, any one or more of the billboards noted by the exemplary locations on FIGURE 1 could be indoor billboards as described above.

The further advantage of the present invention is that it permits a client who wishes to purchase ad space on a particular electronic billboard to do so completely, or almost completely, without the intervention by the billboard provider.

Alternatively, a company utilizing indoor, or outdoor, billboards at store
5 locations in various geographic areas, could upload any desired information to any selected billboard remotely. For example, if a particular company decided to run a Labor Day sale, it could merely upload an ad describing such sale to selected billboards at selected stores throughout the world.

Referring to FIGURE 3, a client who wishes to display their ad on a particular
10 billboard somewhere within the world will log on to a network, such as the Internet or the Internet 2, and visit the website operated by the billboard provider. In step 302, the client may view a map of the United States, any other country, or even the entire world with indications where the billboard provider's electronic billboards are located. Using a zoom feature, the client may zoom in on a particular location, such as New
15 York City, to pinpoint the location of the electronic billboard, down to the precise city block. Furthermore, the client may view a photo of the billboard showing the billboard height, width, the direction the billboard is facing, etc. Alternatively, even an image of an indoor billboard can be displayed to the client.

In step 303, the client will select a billboard. In step 304, a list of open times
20 and their durations available for ad space at the selected billboard is provided to the client. The client, in step 305, can then select an available time slot and duration.

Upon selection of the available time slot and duration, the cost for the ad space may be provided to the client in those instances where a fee is applicable. Such ad fee may be dependent on several factors, including the time of day during which the ad will be displayed.

5 In step 306, the client will purchase the desired amount of time (if applicable). Such a purchase could be made with a credit card, or the clients may already have an account set up with the billboard provider. Alternatively, a password could be required to be entered before being able to upload any software to the billboard.

10 In step 307, the client proceeds to prepare their own ad (or other information to be displayed) for display. As an alternative, the client may already have an ad, which the client may upload to the billboard provider. If the client needs to prepare an ad, it may do so using prepackaged software, such as PowerPoint™, or a software package may be downloaded from the billboard provider, which enables the client to create an ad. Once the ad is created, then the client may upload the created ad to a
15 central location for approval by the billboard provider in step 308. It is contemplated that such an approval will be required so that the billboard provider can ensure that the displayed ad conforms to the local laws where the billboard is located. Nevertheless, certain pre-approved clients may be able to skip step 308 and upload their ad directly to the billboard system.

20 In step 309, once approved, the ad is scheduled by the billboard provider for download to the selected billboard system for display at the desired time and duration.

Furthermore, a software key may be used by the billboard provider to ensure that only their own secure transmissions are sent to the billboards.

Referring to FIGURE 4, electronic billboards, such as electronic billboard 401 can be located anywhere within the world. In addition, each billboard may have its own website associated with it, wherein the website will be supported by server 405. Server 405 will maintain the web page for billboard 401, and will be accessible by a user over the Internet 403 by going to www.billboard401.com. In the process described above with respect to FIGURE 3, an option may be given to the advertiser to provide further information regarding the ad to be displayed on billboard 401. Such additional information may include details about the product advertised, links to other web sites, etc. If the advertiser uploads such information, the ebillboard.net server 402 will then subsequently download that information to billboard401.com. Subsequently, when an individual views that particular advertisement on billboard 401, somewhere on billboard 401 there will be a message that further information regarding products shown on the billboard 401 can be found at billboard401.com. This message could be displayed by the electronic billboard, or could merely be printed on the border of billboard 401. Then, when the person gets to their computer 404, and they access billboard401.com, they will be able to view the additional information provided by the advertiser. The foregoing will be performed for each individual billboard throughout the entire world, wherein each such billboard will have its own web page.

Each billboard could also broadcast, on particular wireless frequencies to passers by, information about the billboard or its ads, in a manner similar to the way airport information is broadcast to car radios when cars near an airport.

Referring to FIGURE 5, one of the issues regarding implementation of electronic billboards is the transmission of the data to and from the billboards in a wireless mode. Although cellular, satellite, fiber and cable technologies can perform this function, another viable transmission medium is radio frequency (RF) waves. By using voice mobile channels, for example, which cover distances up to 15 miles, the system would be able to digitally repeat data messages for other data links and at the same time provide data input/output services at a node (billboard). A path could include up to several repeaters. As a result, the system could easily cover 120-150 miles from a source location, which is connected by telephone, cellular modem, satellite, etc. to a central control center. Such a central control center 501 may house the ebillboard.net server 402. The link to the main link 502 in one city (e.g., Los Angeles) could be made by any type of telecommunications means, as described above. Likewise, the connection between control center 501 and the main link 506 (e.g., New York) could also be made by any type of telecommunications link. Each main link will then have a wireless connection to a first repeater node 503, 507, which are then connected by a wireless connection to the next repeater node 504, 508, which could then be coupled to the next repeater node 505, 509 by another wireless connection. Each of these nodes involves a wireless repeater, and may be located at

the various billboard sites within the particular locale. As a result, a main link can communicate with all the billboards within an area by wireless RF communications.

Although the present invention and its advantages have been described in detail, it should be understood that various changes, substitutions and alterations can be made herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined
5 by the appended claims.

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